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GAO updates Rehberg on Libby investigation

U.S. Rep. Denny Rehberg (R-Mont.) announced Aug. 16 that the General Accounting Office (GAO) has updated him about its ongoing investigation into the Environmental Protection Agency's handling of asbestos contamination in Libby.

Rehberg requested the probe early in his first term in Congress following a series of personal visits to Libby.

"The number one priority in Libby is making sure residents get the health care they need and deserve, and the community is rid of any potential future harm from the contamination," Mr. Rehberg said.

"I want to commend the EPA for placing the Libby cleanup on their priority list, but at the same time, we knew early on the vermiculite mined there contained high levels of toxicity, and that people were suffering, yet it has taken several years to begin to respond to the source," he said. "I



Rehberg

feel we have a clear obligation to raise questions, find answers, and try to prevent this from occurring again."

According to the GAO, the investigation is concentrating on three main areas:

- History of the EPA's involvement prior to 1999
- Extent of costs incurred so far, and potential future expenditures
- EPA's overall plan for asbestos contamination caused by vermiculite mined at Libby, and processed and distributed throughout the country

Mr. Rehberg said the investigation continues and when it is complete he will determine if further congressional action is warranted, including introducing legislation to ward off any potential problems that may be uncovered.

Mr. Rehberg has visited Libby four times and worked to convince the EPA to place Libby on the agency's National Priorities List earlier this year. EPA workers are currently removing asbestos in the community.